Contents

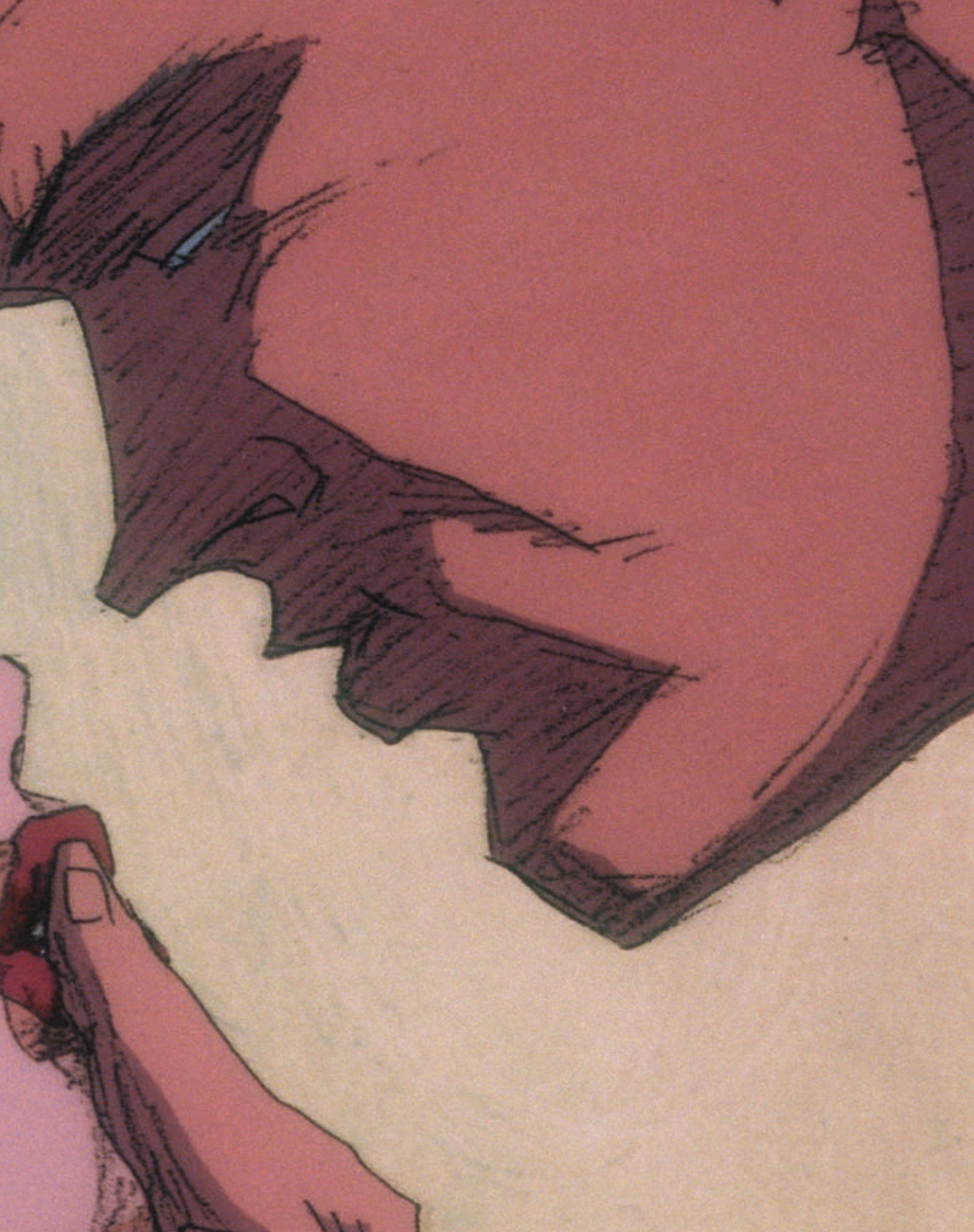
6
Introductions: Patton Oswalt and Chris Miller

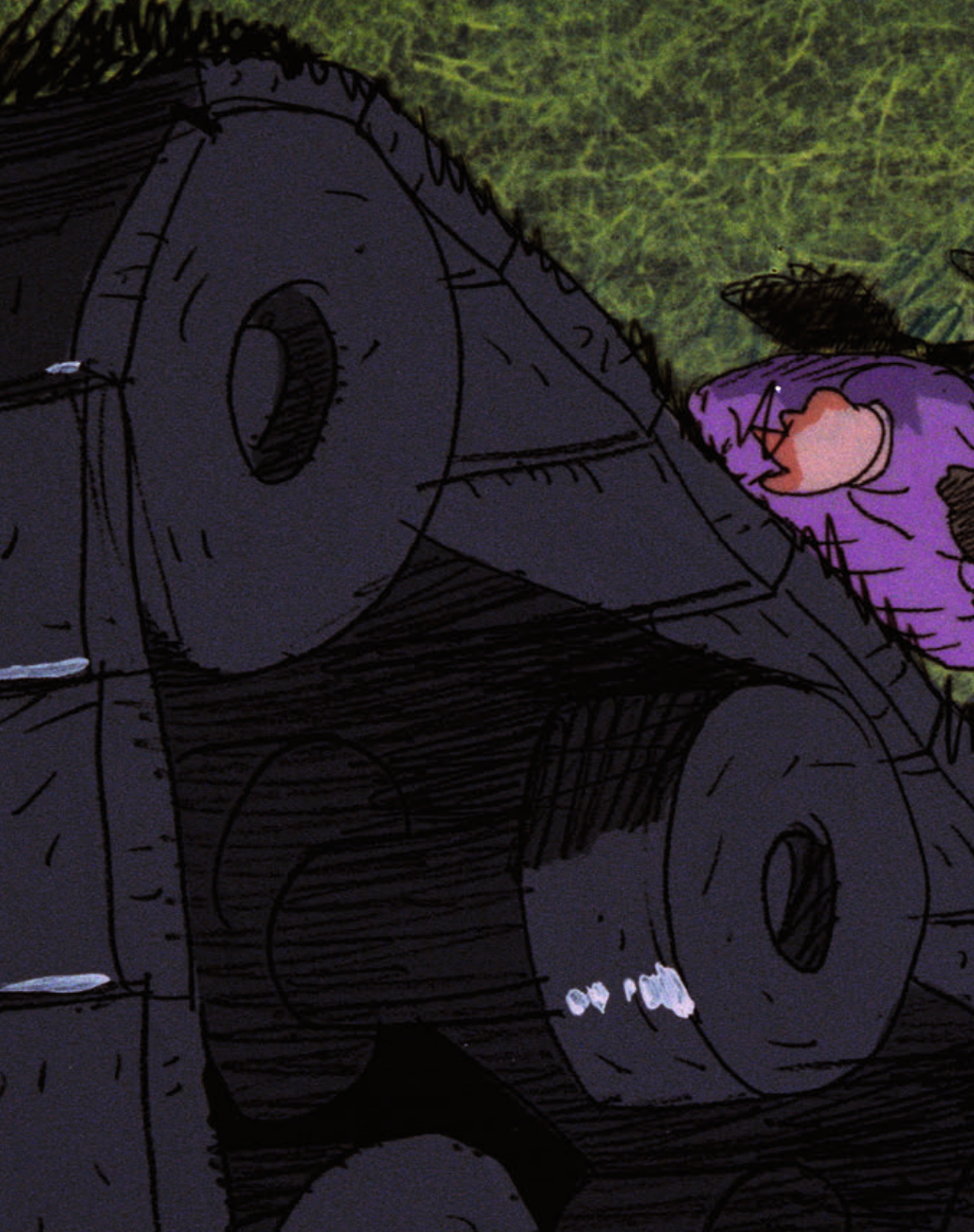
10
Introduction by Jerry Beck

16
Essay by Walter Chaw

36
Essay by David B. Levy

56
Notes on the restoration & Acknowledgements





INTRODUCTIONS

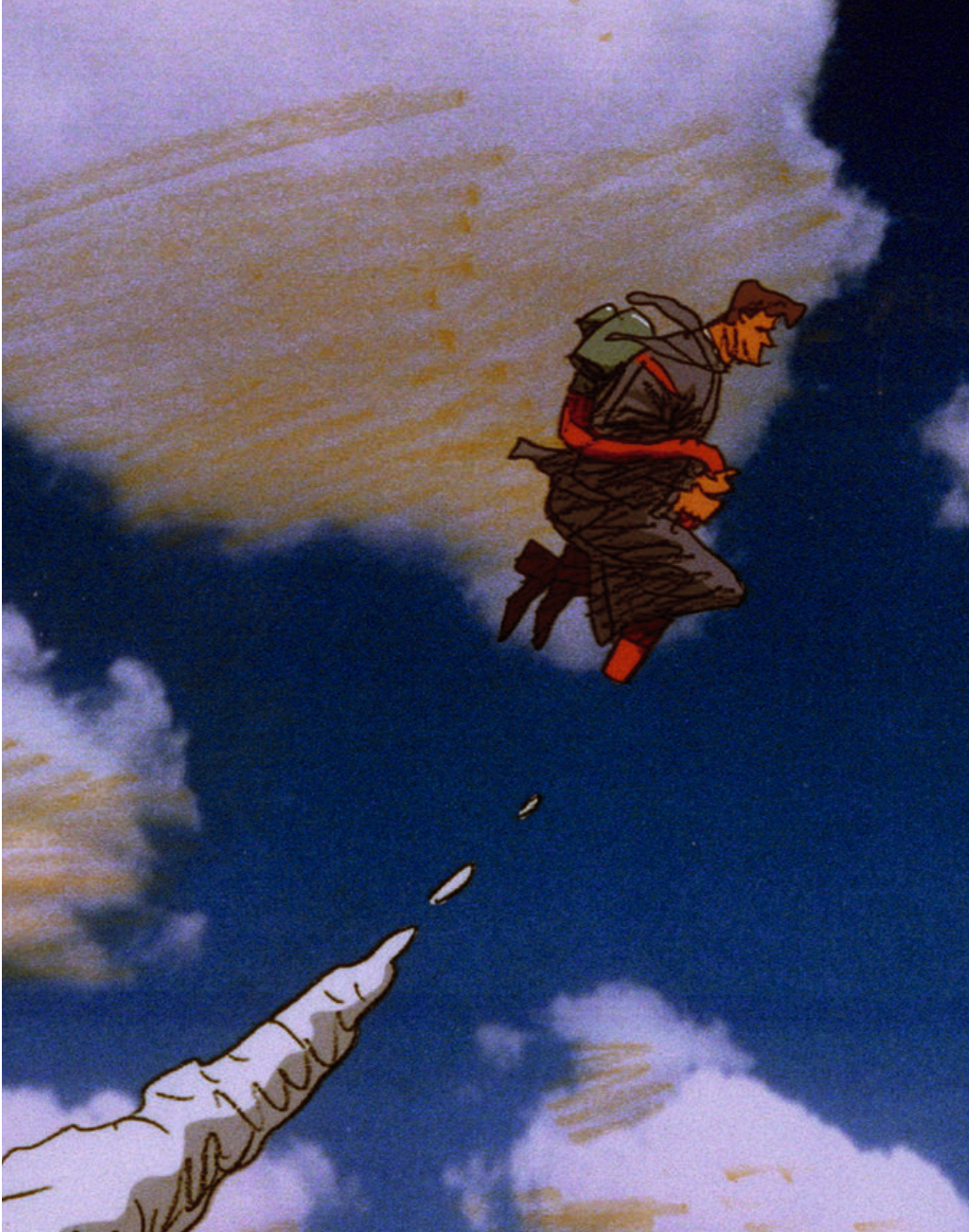
Getting to work with Bill on his short 'The Loneliest Stoplight' is something 16 year-old me, going to Spike & Mike's Animation Festival and watching 'Your Face' and 'How to Kiss' — would never have imagined for my life.

Patton Oswalt

Phil Lord and I had been huge fans of Bill since childhood, watching his "Plymptoon" shorts like *Your Face*, *25 Ways to Quit Smoking*, and *How to Kiss.* His impish, subversive humor and loose, imaginative drawing style were a creative North Star for me as a young, budding filmmaker. While I was in college, I reached out to apply for a job during an off term in 1996 and he hired me to paint cels for him for the film *I Married a Strange Person!* I got to watch over his shoulder and see how his wild brain works. I also learned his indie animation production process, a methodology I shared with Phil when I returned to college and we both put to use when we made our own student films.

Bill was always very kind and generous to me even though I was some punk kid who was sloppy about cleaning his paintbrushes. I admired how he set up a system to do his own thing, his own way, with complete creative control. His irreverence, his independence, and his whimsical spirit have been huge influences on me throughout my career. His films are funny and delightful, and I remain in awe of his talent with a pencil.

Chris Miller (producer/writer, THE LEGO MOVIE, SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE)



INTRODUCTION

by

Jerry Beck

There are many words that can describe the career of Bill Plympton. But here are five: Cartoonist. Animator. Independent. Pioneer. And Original.

I first became aware of Cartoonist Bill Plympton through his hilarious social commentary comic strips in a New York alternative paper, *The Soho Weekly News*. His strips were funny, his commentary sharp and the drawings were way better than they had to be. This guy had a unique style of his own and I began keeping my eye out for more Plympton.

Animator Bill Plympton popped into life when I first saw his short "*Your Face*". It won a few prestigious festival awards and was being considered for the Tournee of Animation in 1987 - where I happened to be employed at the time. My boss showed it to me on a 3/4" U-Matic video tape (the best professional quality at the time) he picked up at the Annecy Festival that year. I went wild for it - though my employer couldn't understand my (nor the crowd at Annecy's) enthusiasm for it. He wasn't used to watching an abstract film, with no story. I remember explaining to him it was a tour-de-force of metamorphosis animation - and the drawings were just plain… funny! I don't think I ever laughed at an experimental non-narrative piece before. To me it was revelatory. An introduction to a new animation master.

Independent filmmaker Bill Plympton and I became personal friends from around that time onward. We both shared a love for great animated films - and a strong desire to disprove that animation wasn't/isn't exclusively a children's medium (a widely held perception in the United States, since the 1950s, was that cartoons were solely for kids). We both did this in our own unique ways. Bill made films that would appeal to everyone - but primarily adults. I wrote books on the history of animation and worked in film distribution (anime and independent animation, in particular).

Pioneer Bill Plympton might be the most exciting of all Plympton personas. This designation was applied to him with the release of his first feature, *The Tune*. Years before digital animation programs and laptop computers, Bill pioneered and popularized the idea of one animator making a complete feature film (over an hour in length) on his own (or with minimal assistance). There were a few previous attempts (Lotte Reiniger's 1926 *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* and Chuck Swenson's X-rated *Dirty Duck* (1974) come to mind), but none were distributed as widely as Bill's films - nor achieved his phenomenal success.

Bill's ability to create stories, sketch gags (verbal and non-verbal), and animate them brilliantly, at great speed - incorporating comic exaggeration into characters we care about - this is his secret sauce. It's what makes him truly an Original. A cartoonist "hyphenate" with a vision, the guts to do it alone, with the talent to communicate to (and entertain) the masses.

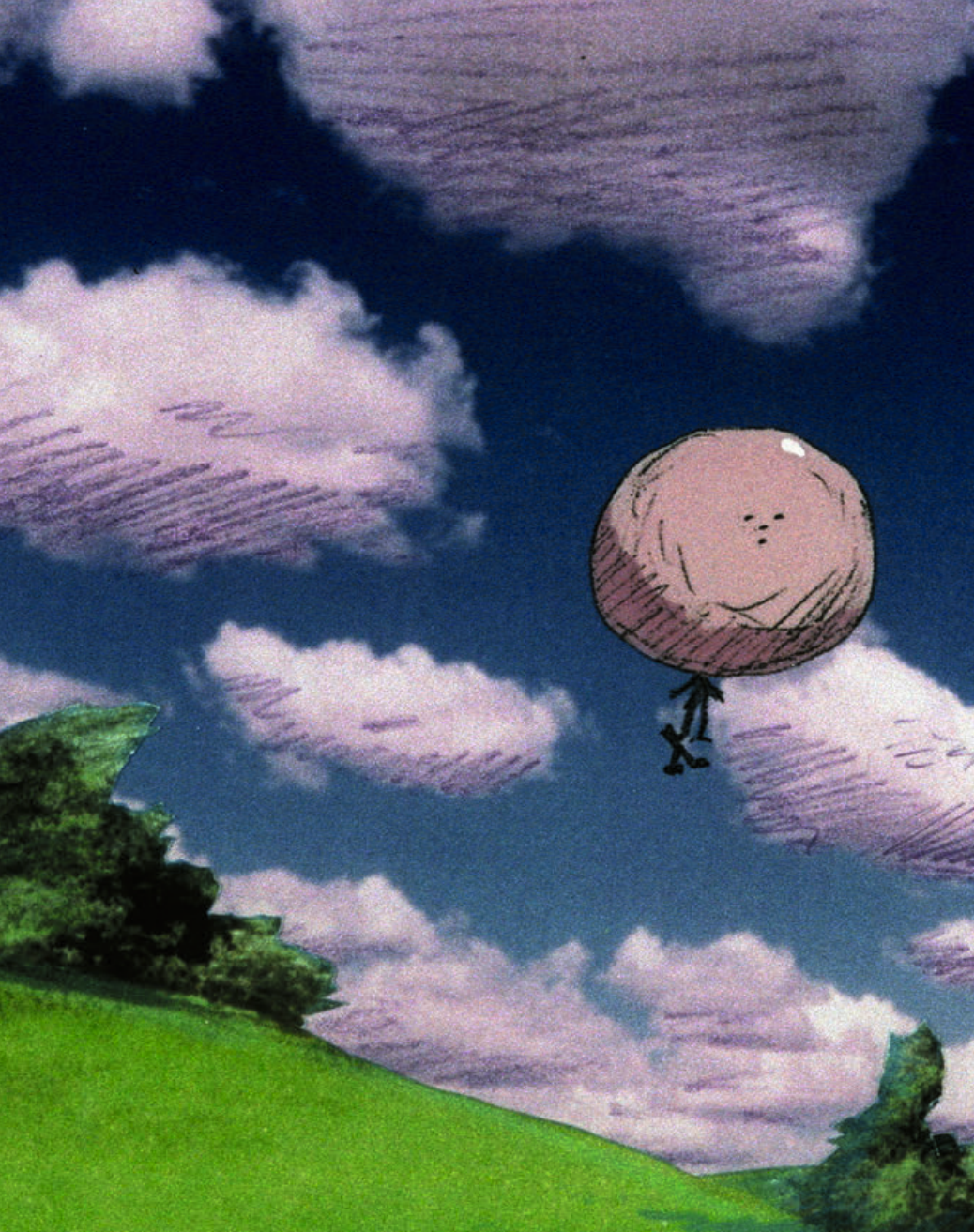
I Married A Strange Person! is my favorite of Bill's features (it's impossible for me to select a favorite among his shorts - to me they are *all* masterpieces). If you are looking to introduce a novice to Plympton's world, *Strange Person* is a great place to start. It's all there: Sex, violence, biting social satire, all rolled into an absolutely bizarre, absolutely hilarious plot line. More importantly, Plympton uses the animation medium to its fullest - everything illustrated and drawn in his inimitable style.

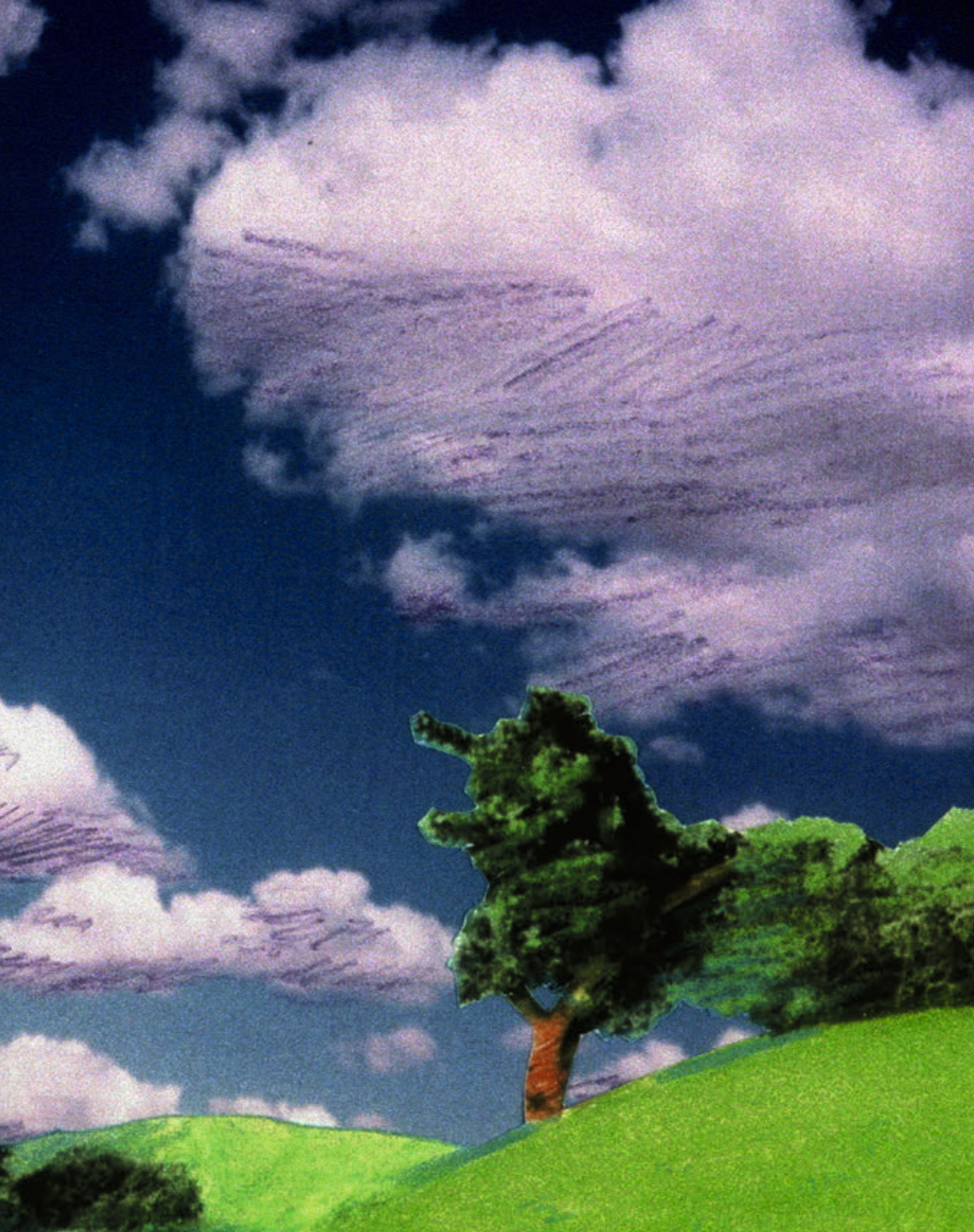
I just thought of a few more words to describe Bill Plympton: Passionate. Innovative… and Twisted Genius. Watching this film is all the proof you need of that.

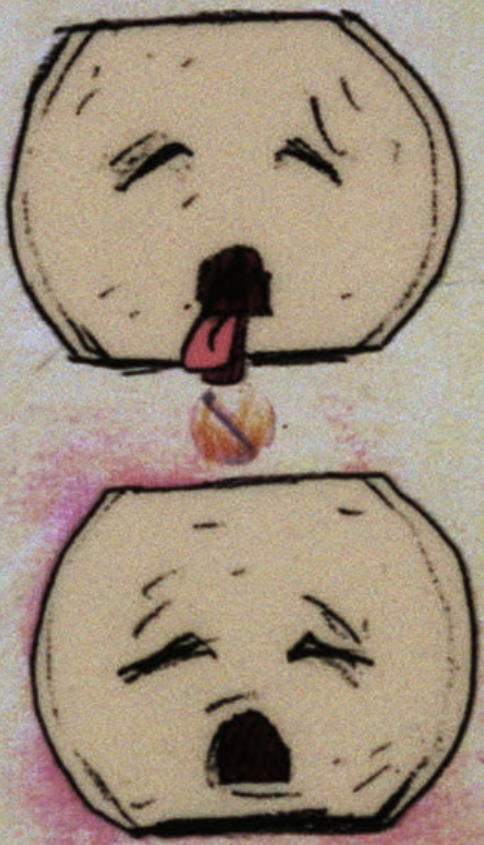
Enjoy!

Jerry Beck
Burbank, Ca

(Jerry Beck is an animation historian who has written fifteen books on the subject, teaches at Cal Arts and UCLA and blogs at CartoonResearch.com)







I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON!

by

Walter Chaw

I Married a Strange Person! is hardcore, advanced Bill Plympton: Bill Plympton in a David Lynchian humor, tackling the hypocrisies and grotesqueries of suburban mating; Bill Plympton in a Clive Barkeresque state of mind, transgressing the boundary between sex and mutilation; Plympton in his more usual Cronenbergian temper exploring the outer limits of the elastic mutating pleasures of the trembling new flesh. His concerns are multifoliate and while the approach here is typically irreverent, there is an undeniable menace to this work that you can take as diagnosis or warning. The main character of *I Married a Strange Person!* has a tumor at the base of his skull - or a previously-undiscovered gland that has decided to announce itself as a thing independent of the greater body politic. Its sudden metastasis is a by-product of an accident involving the television and a pair of birds in mid-flight fuck. Such is Plympton's particular genius that his satire runs from the parasitic militarism of Robert Heinlein's The Puppet Masters to the metal fetishism of J.G. Ballard's Crash; his unsettling worldview invites us to view the familiar as uncanny while prophesying human evolution as a miracle sympathetic to machine evolution. Plympton's notion of singularity has less to do with AI achieving sentience as it does with the growth of the beast converging with the ambitions of the things it's created. We will meet at the singularity and something new will be the product of that collision and the greatest danger is our refusal to see the fatal trajectories we are on.

Collisions are how *I Married a Strange Person!* starts with a randy brown bird in flight targeting and nailing a blue bird minding her own business. Is it rape? It's not unlike the opening of *Dr. Strangelove* with its series of aircraft, the phallic KC-135 Stratotanker pumping fuel into a rounded,

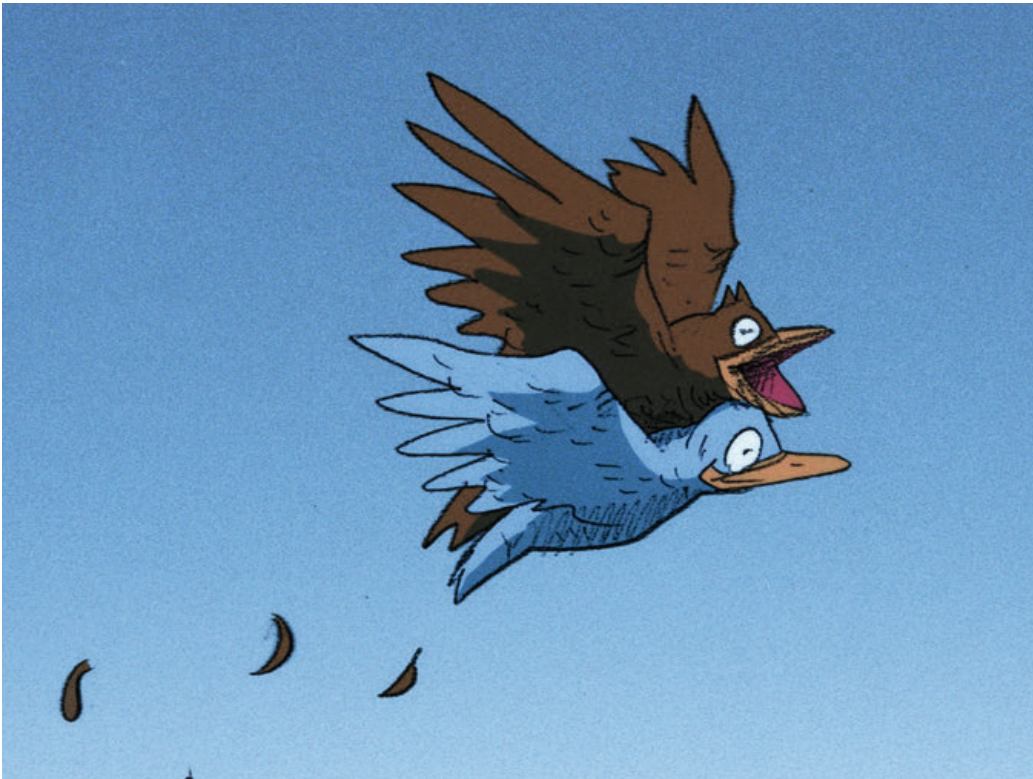
pregnant-with-munitions B-52 (affectionately known as the "BUFF," the Big Ugly Fat Fucker) in mid-flight. Ridiculous, protracted, Plympton's midair coital ballet ends with a crash into a satellite dish which sends a mutating stab of radiation into Grant (voiced by Tom Larson). Grant who dutifully, if only for a while, rejects his wife Keri's (Charis Michelsen) advances in favor of his work. Her gyrations, though, prove too persuasive and Grant and Keri retire off-screen only for just a moment before Keri flees back to her parents' home, scandalized by the size of her husband's priapic member. "Your father and I never approved of Grant," Keri's Mom (Ruth Ray) assures as she washes a carrot suggestively before chopping it into chunks. It raises questions, this sequence does: surely this isn't the first time Keri has seen Grant disrobed - surely she's not a virgin given her extraordinary seductive gyrations and obvious heat, so what's the deal? Is this another manifestation of Grant's mutation in progress? The next giant step in human evolution as a nasty neck boil and an enhanced boner? The first thing that comes to mind is "sign me up!" which raises other questions like, why I would agree to being physically altered in this way even if it means I give up some measure of self-possession to an alien infection?

Marriage is a promise in *I Married a Strange Person!* but the challenge posed by the picture is whether that promise holds sway if one of the participants in said promise was deceptive. The further question is whether Grant's "illness" is deception - of whether his facade of socialization, stripped with the excitement of this gland, is a lie within Grant's control. Surely Grant did not deceive that he was a man and possessed of a penetrating, penile strategy for coital consummation - surely Keri knew Grant was only acting like a man instead of a shaved ape, a bag of meat and liquid in a tailored suit with a cubicle to occupy. I think marriage is often equated with a kind of docility in men: an agreement to be "good." But that's the subtext of the vow, not the text. Grant will spend the rest of the film exploring his role as employee of the state, as keeper of his estate, as cannon fodder for the military-industrial complex before, finally, as a husband to his wife. Plympton's task as he sees it, is to lay Grant bare and, in the process, put his audience in the excruciating position of witnessing their own undressing. It's a good thing Plympton has a sense of humor.

The root of this exercise is Freudian, yes? An exploration, sometimes fanciful but never so fanciful as you might think, of the length and breadth of ambition should male sexual desire be loosed and unlimited by the constraints of civilization and biology. The trick is to take *I Married a Strange Person!* seriously as a feat of cultural anthropology, of the evolution of human sexuality in all its unfortunate tributaries and delicate conclusions. Keri and Grant are set up against her Mom and Dad (J.B. Adams) as two stages in the life of the matrimonial bed. The nature of the in-laws' disapproval of Grant could be any number of things, but given the framework it's likely they don't like him because of his obvious, even intrusive, masculinity. The father says as much when he abhors music in their home. Music, that notorious inflamer of primitive impulses. The mother, for her part, says as much when she misunderstands Keri's dismay for revulsion at what she presumes to be Grant's repulsive bedroom requests. Over an awkward dinner of soup, Grant discovers that he has developed the power to manifest things through thought. When Keri's mom complains about a small spill attracting bugs, Grant has roaches explode from her face and eyes. When her dad cautions against music, Grant turns the father's face into a "one man band": strings from hair pulled taut so that his face is stretched out painfully; a full brass section erupting from his ears; his teeth the keys of course; and his eyes red-veined percussion, swollen kettle drums keeping time. It's Clive Barker in its agony - images borrowed back and forth specifically from a short Epic Comics run of the *Hellraiser* title or the three-season Bryan Fuller-led *Hannibal*. Delighted, Grant sweeps Keri off her feet and dances a wild jig in tune to her parents' humiliation. It's a truly infernal tableaux. It's pure delight.

Plympton veers from this moment to two other examples of how to upend traditional social expectations generally attached to the married man: work and home maintenance. Work is represented by the cavernous gray boardroom of Larson P. Giles (Richard Spore), the head of a television studio auditing a trio of underlings for their show pitches. Dissatisfied with each, Giles instructs a henchman to visit obscene harm to them before coming up with his own idea for an entertainment, a mash-up of every suggestion in a senseless, meaningless melange. But we see his delight only for his own sadism. *I Married a Strange Person!* shares this theme

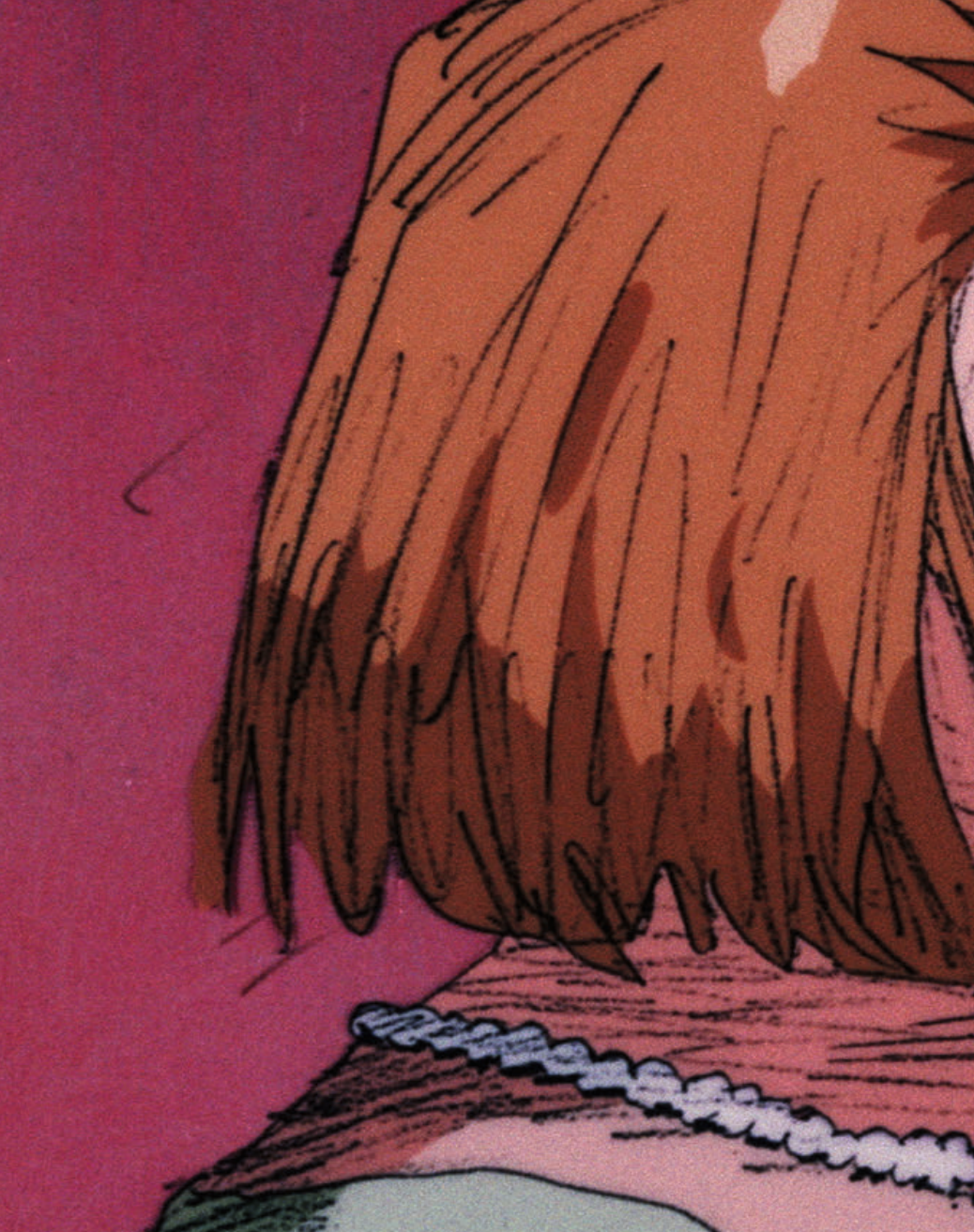
with Plympton's *The Tune*; the "let's put on a show" device that marries specifically well when mixing his shorts into a feature. Next, Plympton draws a man mowing his lawn when his mower is hijacked by suddenly sentient long grasses that resent the blade. With Nature in rebellion, the would-be landscaper is finally caught and murdered… or he would be if not for Grant's late intervention, transforming a riding mower piloted by a murderous weed into a giant, hideous if ultimately benign, caterpillar. The drama of Plympton's work is embedded in the jagged planes of his drawing style. Every sign is a barbed critique of its attached signifier and every train of thought is described along a serrated pencil line. Under his hand, a lush green lawn is a thicket of thorns and something as soft as a kiss between lovers becomes voracious, two sinkholes forever swallowing. Passion becomes an analogue to hunger, and every quotidian labor becomes a desperate gambit for survival.



Back to the domestic drama: Keri watches Grant cycling through dozens of different chairs in their living room, wondering all the while who her husband *really* is. What a beautiful, surreal way to express doubt in a loved one and all the roles they undertake over the course of a lifetime together. Look at how Plympton draws eyes - compare them to Peter Chung's iconic *Aeon Flux*. As Grant tries to make peace with Keri, Keri's eye in extreme closeup rolls and bugs like a ball-shaped creature trapped in the socket of its home. The question of identity is central to Plympton's work, too, his characters often seeking definition through their jobs or the products of their hands before realizing at the end that they are only defined to the extent they ever can be by their loved ones. Watch how it protrudes like a Tex Avery wolf when she spots a mass of cellulite slurping towards her on the floor and an animate collection of wrinkles flying through the air to vividly make Grant's point that his love for her is unconditional. Marriage after all is not a promise to love one person, but the multitude of people your partner will be in the course of their lives. It's very sweet - and comes with a song - but I don't think Plympton's default setting is sweetness. He sings about love but only at extremity: punny and perverse; Spike Jones in the streets, de Sade in the sheets. At the end of Grant's version of "When I'm 64," for instance, he talks about dressing up like a fish and blowing Keri's dad… maybe Kip Addotta, not Spike Jones. Rhyming Keri seeing Grant in various chairs, Grant now sees Keri, naked on top of him, as a variety of women: each fantasies of various fetishes (nun, furry, robot, cheerleader). The difference between men and women is thus animated on the one level, on another, an artist's examination of how a single gag can be used to contradicting effect. Think of the object symphony in Jeunet & Caro's *Delicatessen* and how this sex scene ends with an elderly couple renewing interest at the sight of Keri's aroused breasts. Sometimes rhythm creates music, sometimes just a cacophony: sometimes a montage of Kuleshovian interest reveals a woman's fears about her husband, and sometimes it unlocks the ignoble fantasies a man has about everyone except his wife.

Plympton working blue is a fascination, too, in that all of his trademark queasiness and body horror is now mixed with a healthy level of eroticism in a way that's… confusing, to say the least. Plympton is a very good artist and the sex, stylized as it is, is excellent. With Cronenberg, the sex

is seldom good - ditto Lynch. What might distinguish Plympton in this sandbox is the extent to which he manages both at the same time. What if *Crash* and *Videodrome*, *Blue Velvet* and *Wild at Heart* were actually hot instead of depictions of sex as imagined by insect anthropologists and lunatics? *I Married a Strange Person!* is a deeply uncomfortable watch in many ways. A *grand guignol* horrorshow and a serious soft-core pornography that wears its influences on its sleeve while providing useful gender and social commentary. The best sequence of the piece comes next with a Catskills-style comedian Solly Jim who, bombing with his ancient gags, starts dismembering himself to the enthusiastic approval of his audience. As his parts are being carted away, he reminds Grant that if anyone needs a smile they should [ripping off his lips] give them one of his. There's more than a little of Damien Leone's Art the Clown in this act: a theater of extremities, of atrocities, of absurdity, really, with farce replaced by graphic physical harm. These are the waters in which Plympton likes to swim, I think, the jester to the audience's king, testing the outer limits of what's acceptable and then pushing beyond. If you can't get a laugh from a joke, get one from shock and discomfort. His work is a medicine for our creeping complacency.



Plympton preserves the last half of *I Married a Strange Person!* for an extended, the longest of the film, excoriation of the bellicose masculinity represented on an individual and collective level by the armed forces. If what's come before is an intimate dissection of matters between men and women, what's left is the consequences on a global scale of creating an entire population of radicalized psychopaths, controlled by the autonomous, the lizard portions of the brain. Perhaps not coincidentally, Grant's tumor, his tumescent Id if you will, is located right at the medulla oblongata: the dorsal cousin of H.P. Lovecraft's excited pituitary glands. Plympton covers the screen with images of tanks fucking, of a gaffed populace programmed by the infuriating garbage on their television sets, of a light reflecting off a discarded beer can the trigger for Grant's self-discovery. Army Col. Ferguson (Chris Cooke), a giant, bipedal lizard, sees the obvious military applications of Grant's advantageous malfunction and so seeks to abduct him for study. What he doesn't realize is how the thing that has made Grant so dangerous is a toxic but easy-to-replicate all-American stew of television, beer and unbridled, mindless bestial rutting. Ferguson is joined by TV exec Giles and Grant's tumor is excised and then implanted, in turn, in each of the villains' brainstems to various, florid result.

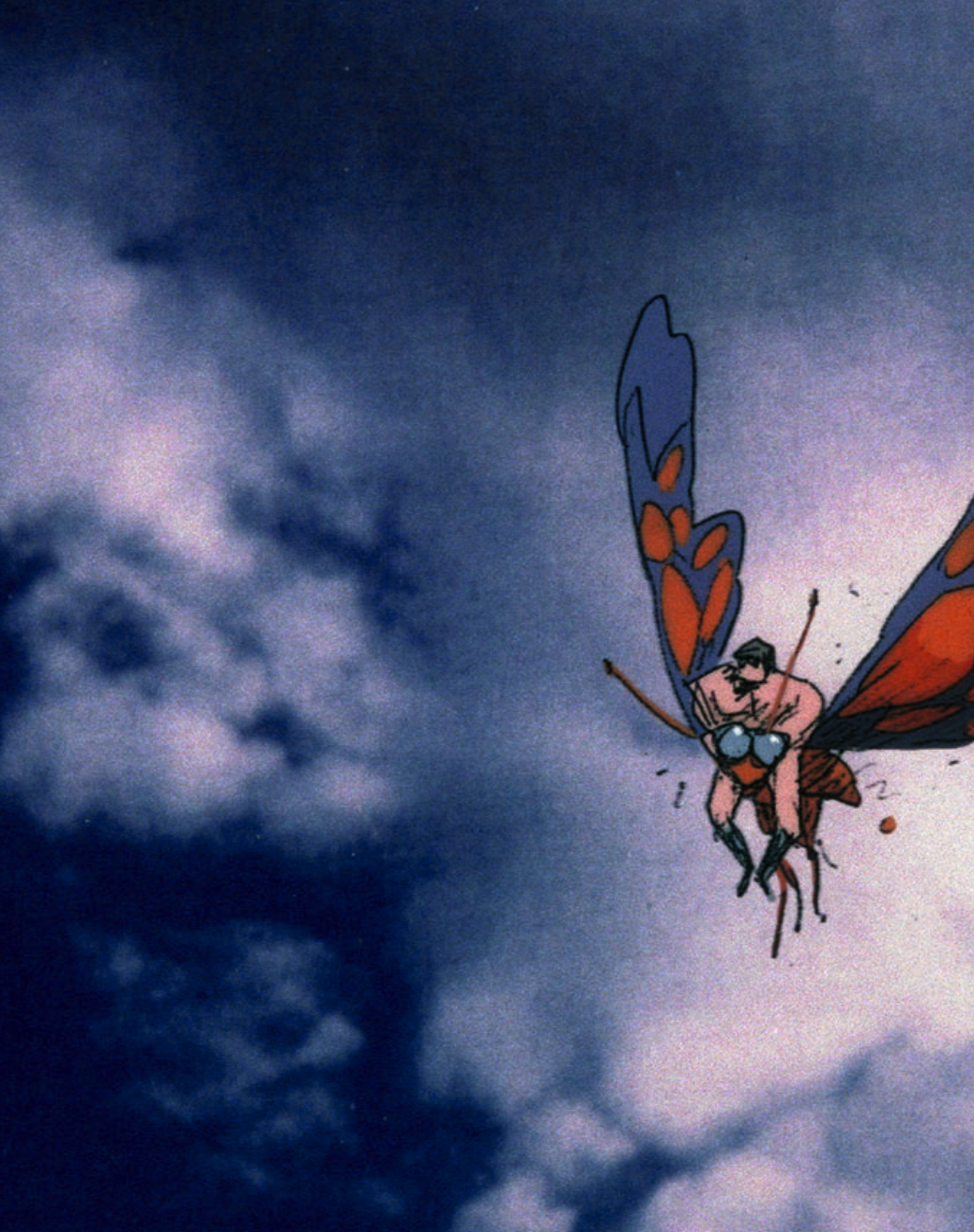
The conclusion of the piece shows up over ten years later in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* in the form of an invasive, essentially all-seeing surveillance state manned by Giles who is not, physiologically, up to the task of processing that volume of information. Grant and Keri are reunited, tearing around the desert in a cherry red convertible trying to escape back into their bucolic white picket fence existence. The calamity leading up to this moment is a genuinely mad volume of human carnage: a mega-tank straight from Douglas Adams' Mostly Harmless, a scything through a mob like the helicopter rotor sequence from *28 Weeks Later*, an unconventional rearview mirror ornament that reminded me perversely of Oliver Stone's *U-Turn* with its own cherry red sports car - and finally the ineffable, familial, American gothic of a similarly-gore-flecked finale to Rob Zombie's *The Devil's Rejects*. What to make of this film, this animated circus of atrocities, that centers so many images in the service of so many current theories about the events leading up to the end of the world? What to make of the evil corporation in this world being named "Smile Corp"

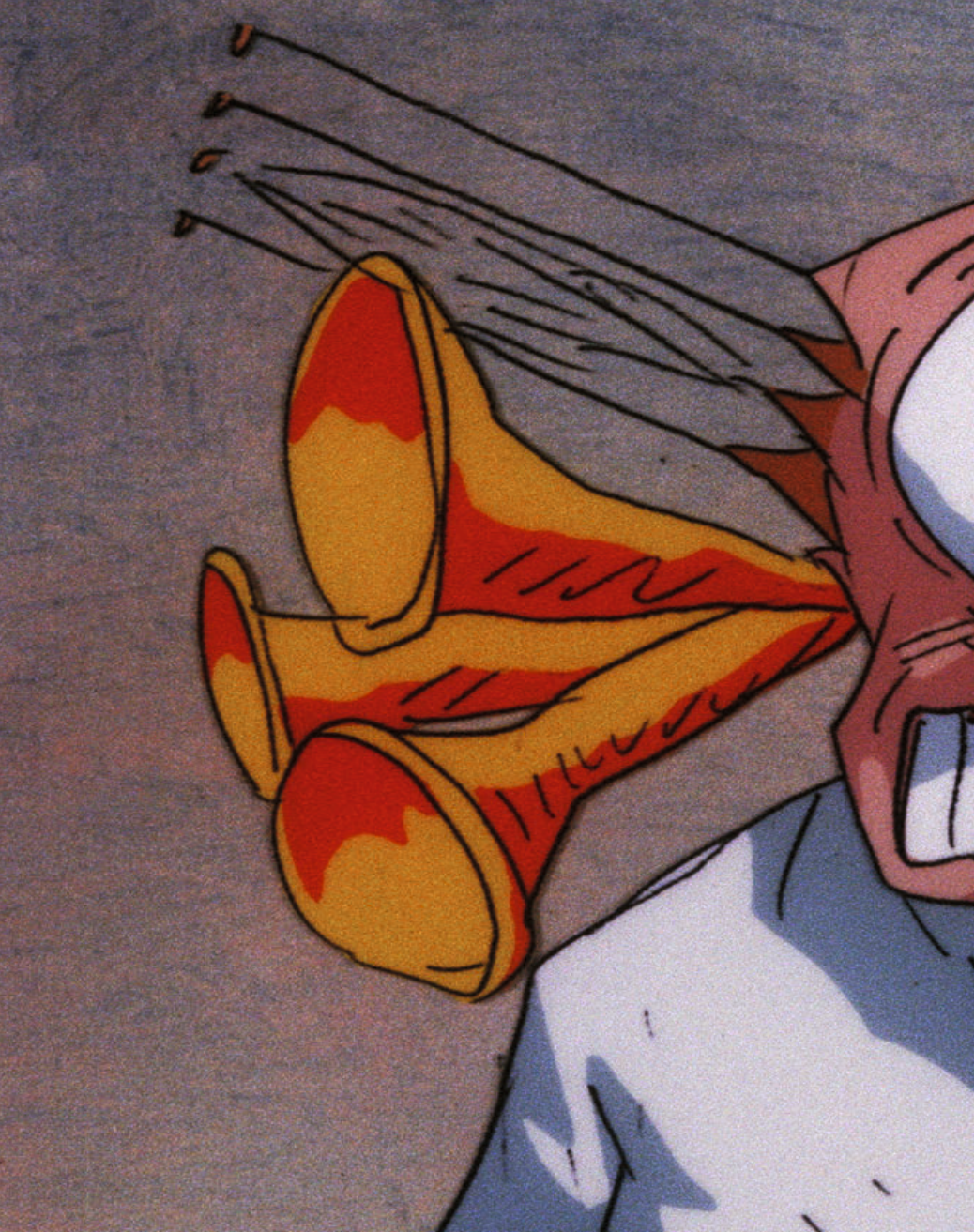
in oblique reference to Batman's The Joker, perhaps - and ultimately how do we reconcile this piece of satirical brilliance (there's even a little bit of the Prez Rickard from issue #54 of Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* run in here) as a creation unto itself? The product of a singular experimental/surrealist voice that in the end has largely created a fantasia unique to itself? As proof of its *sui generis* invention, I offer a *deus ex machina* from the caterpillar introduced in its landscape segment, a tiny ambiguously villainous sidekick that presages *Rick & Morty*'s "Mr. Poopybutthole," a bloody chase sequence between a wheelchair and a man using a bisected corpse as a skateboard, and an evil familiar in barking seal form.

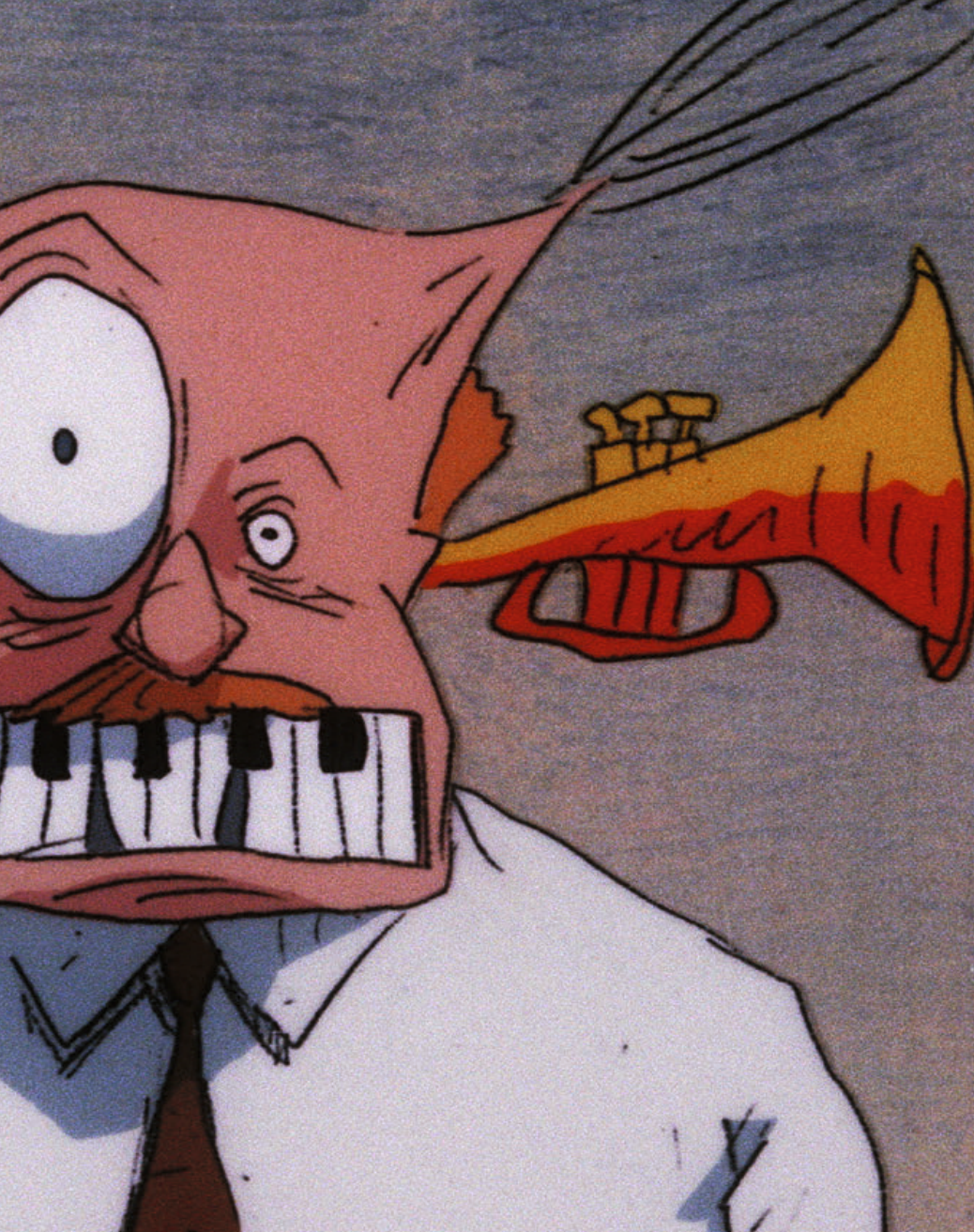
But there's more to Plympton and *I Married a Strange Person!* than the pleasure of the new. It's more than the deadpan, Buster Keaton timing of his comedy, the extended setups and byzantine, always bizarre payoffs. No, what fascinates about the artist is his dedication not to shock but to find the evolutionary/behavioral rationale at the basis of each of his gags. What is this film, after all, than a collection in part of short subjects that speak to male sexuality in all its scattershot violence? What pleases the lizard brain after all is bread and savage circus, violent pornography and stolen sexual gratification mixed with the subjugation and enslavement of other men? Plympton defines the struggle between the cruelty of the Old Testament and the grace of the New as the battle between Id and Ego in a single gland tickled in a single man. Grant's punishment of his in-laws is one of the most loaded and discomfiting comedy bits I'd ever seen until I caught *Freddy Got Fingered* a couple of years later and instantly found a connection between Plympton's psychosexual emotional brutality and Tom Green's. Plympton's great gift is his ability to push every button, naturally, but more it's this unmistakable honesty and vulnerability. I don't know if anyone who hasn't spent a good deal of time in self-reflection and even self-loathing could represent the human body contorted into this many mortified, destroyed, humiliated states.

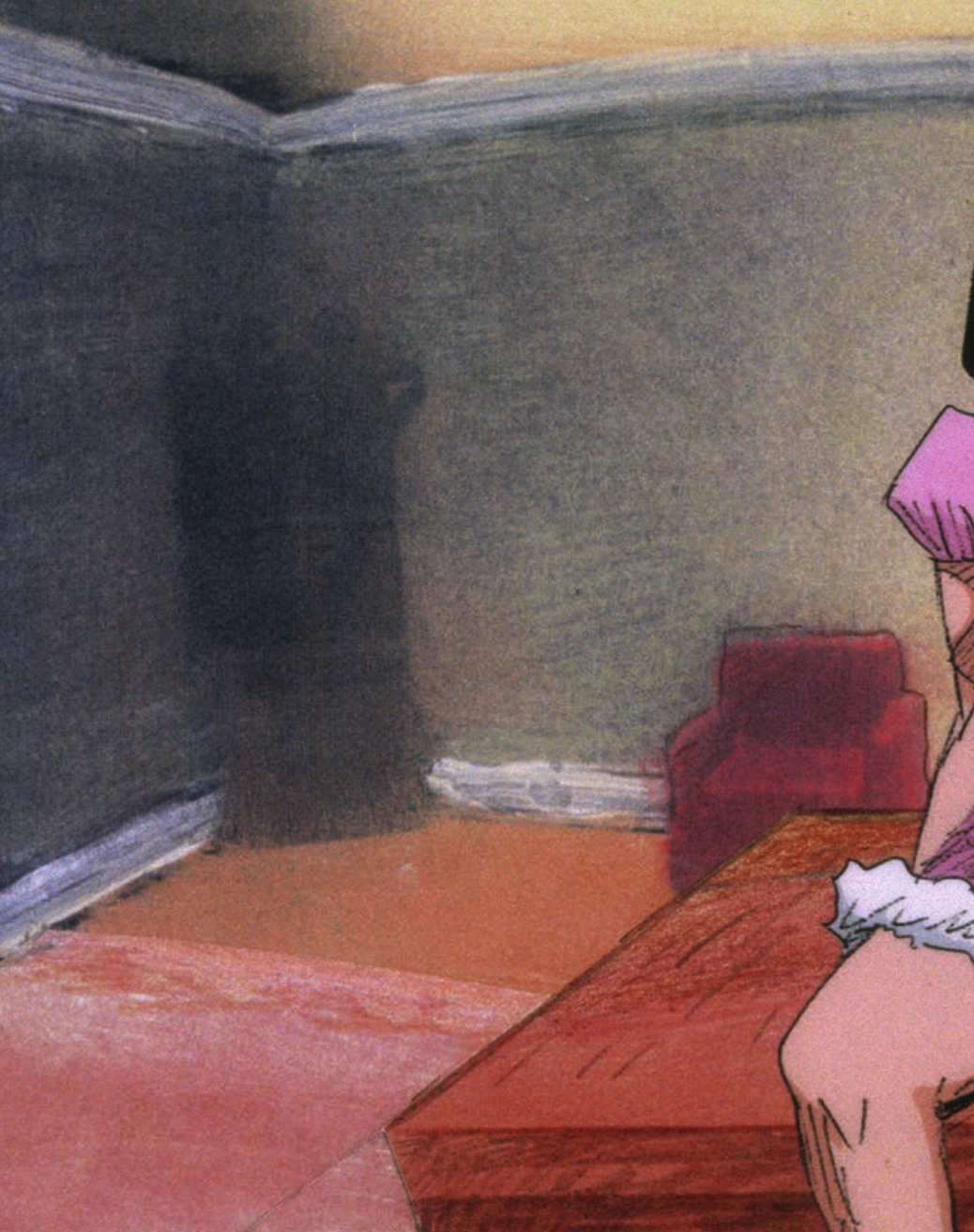
I have been a fan of Bill Plympton's for as long as I can remember, but I don't know that I ever really strove to understand why. There's something Nietzschean in my reluctance to look into this particular abyss - I feared that in looking into why I was so drawn to his work, I would find myself in there looking back at me. Indeed, were I to program this film or assign it for study, I would do it in a pairing with Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. *Vertigo* which is that artist's rawest, nakedest confession of the unbearable, suffocating gravity of civilized man shackled in eternity to too-weak flesh. *Vertigo* is Hitchcock's testimony against the ugliest parts of himself, the eloquent and meticulous deconstruction of his character and, along the way, the character of all men at the lowest depth of their depredation and corporeal appetites. We act like monsters and believe we are saints. We pretend the spirits that compel us are divine when they are merely the primordial undertow of the reproductive riptide. Plympton's work cuts through the illusions we construct to keep us strangers to ourselves. Just *I Married a Strange Person!*'s title takes on the paradox of close conduct with an unknowable stranger, but presented hysterically as the lurid title for a pulp novel. And why not? What really is the difference between this picture's emotional ebbs and flows and those of a corset-busting James M. Cain *noir* potboiler? A man's most basic impulses are gratified, inflamed, *engorged* by a *femme fatale* who leads him on a trail littered with corpses and selfish, carnal intentions. Plympton identifies those provocations as the collision of mass media, abuse of intoxicants, free access to firearms and the conspiracy between our corporate masters to make us stupid and bloodthirsty to keep the wheels of profitable appropriation greased. "Please Laugh" a sign flashes mid-film, just before gobbets of flesh and grue fly in earnest. "Please Laugh."

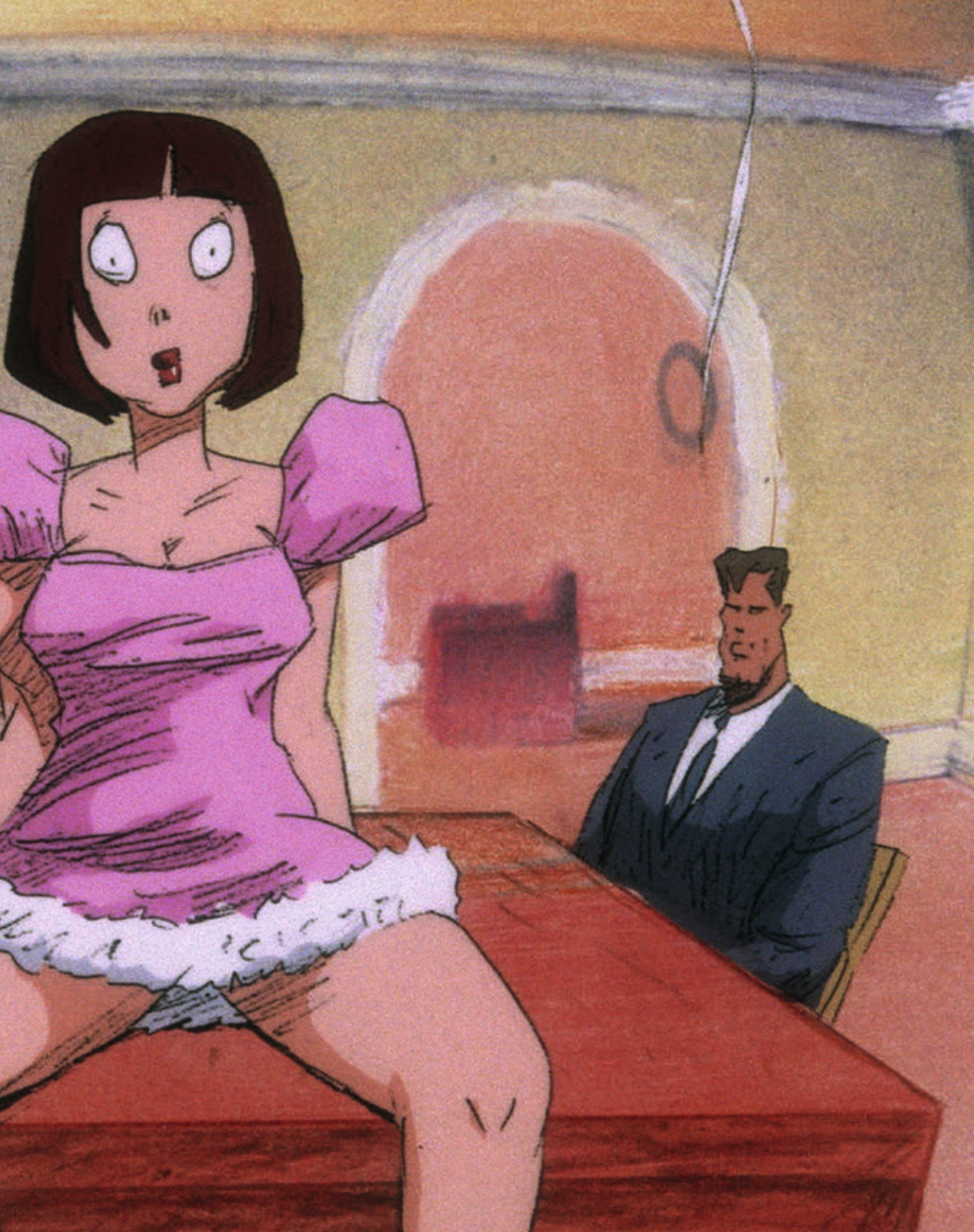
Walter Chaw is Senior Film Critic for FilmFreakCentral.net. He has bylines in the *NY Times, Washington Post, Criterion, The LA Weekly, NY Post's Decider, NY Magazine's Vulture*, and is an occasional guest on NPR's "Pop Culture Happy Hour." He has written a monograph on *Miracle Mile* and a critical study of the career of Walter Hill called "A WALTER HILL FILM."

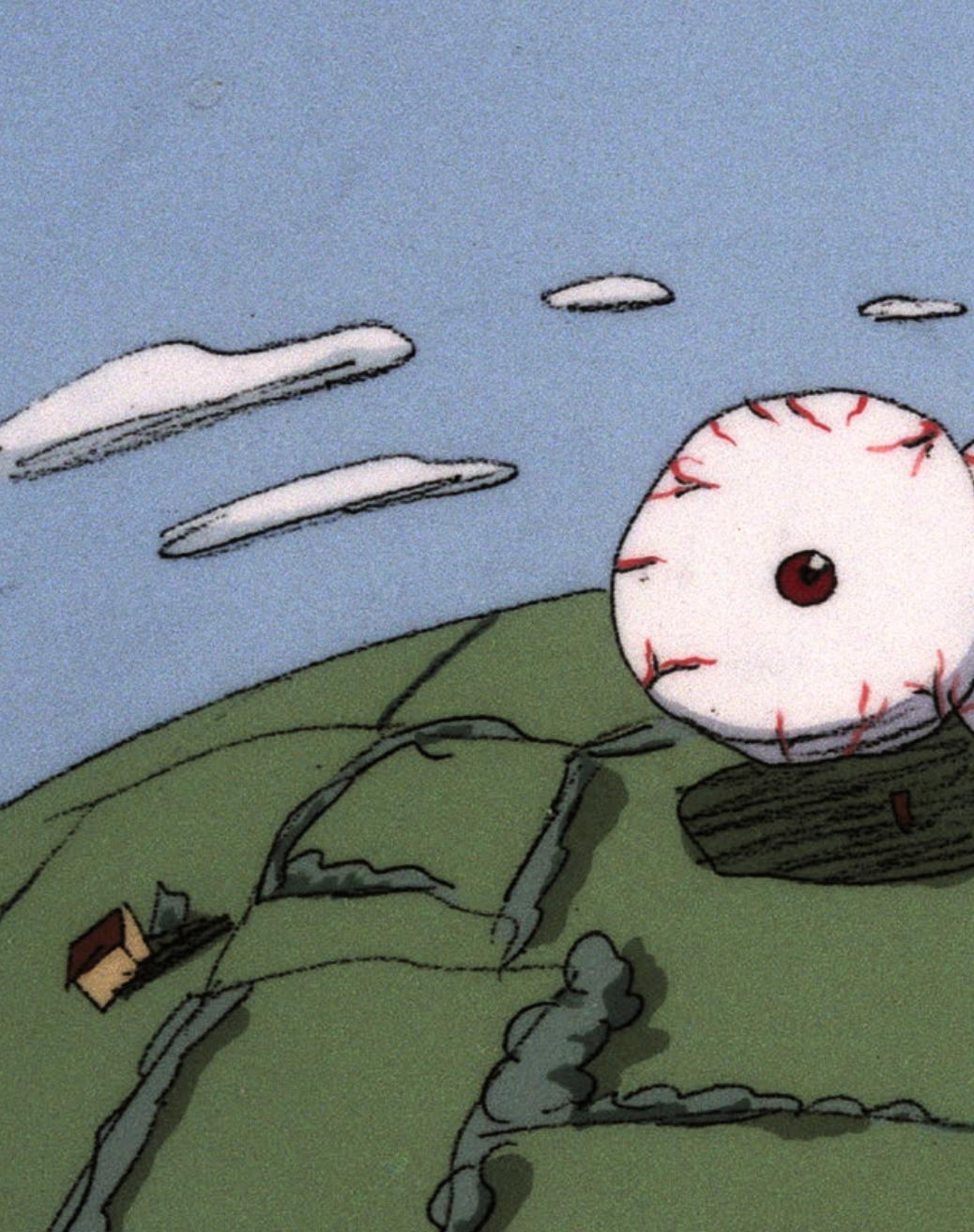


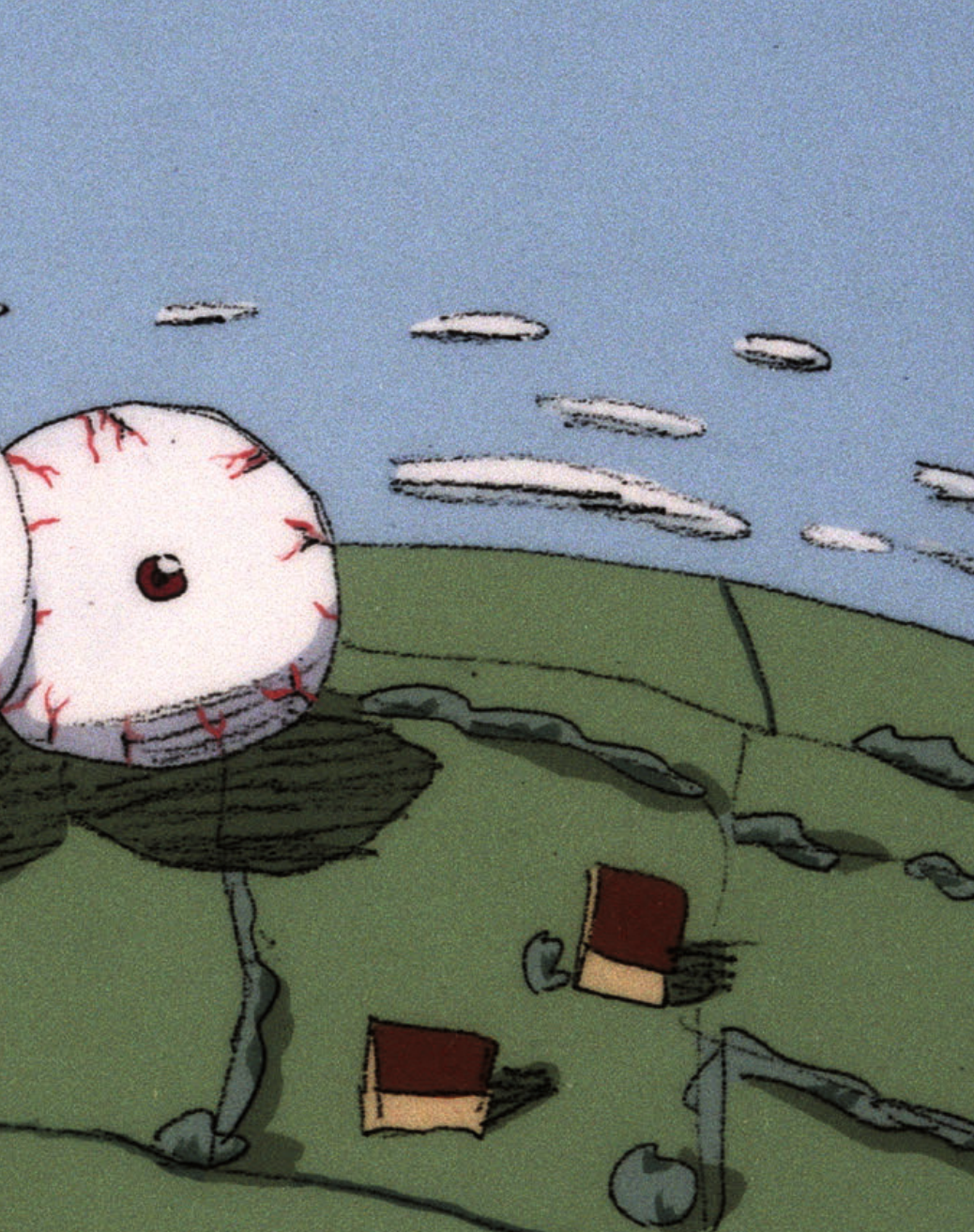












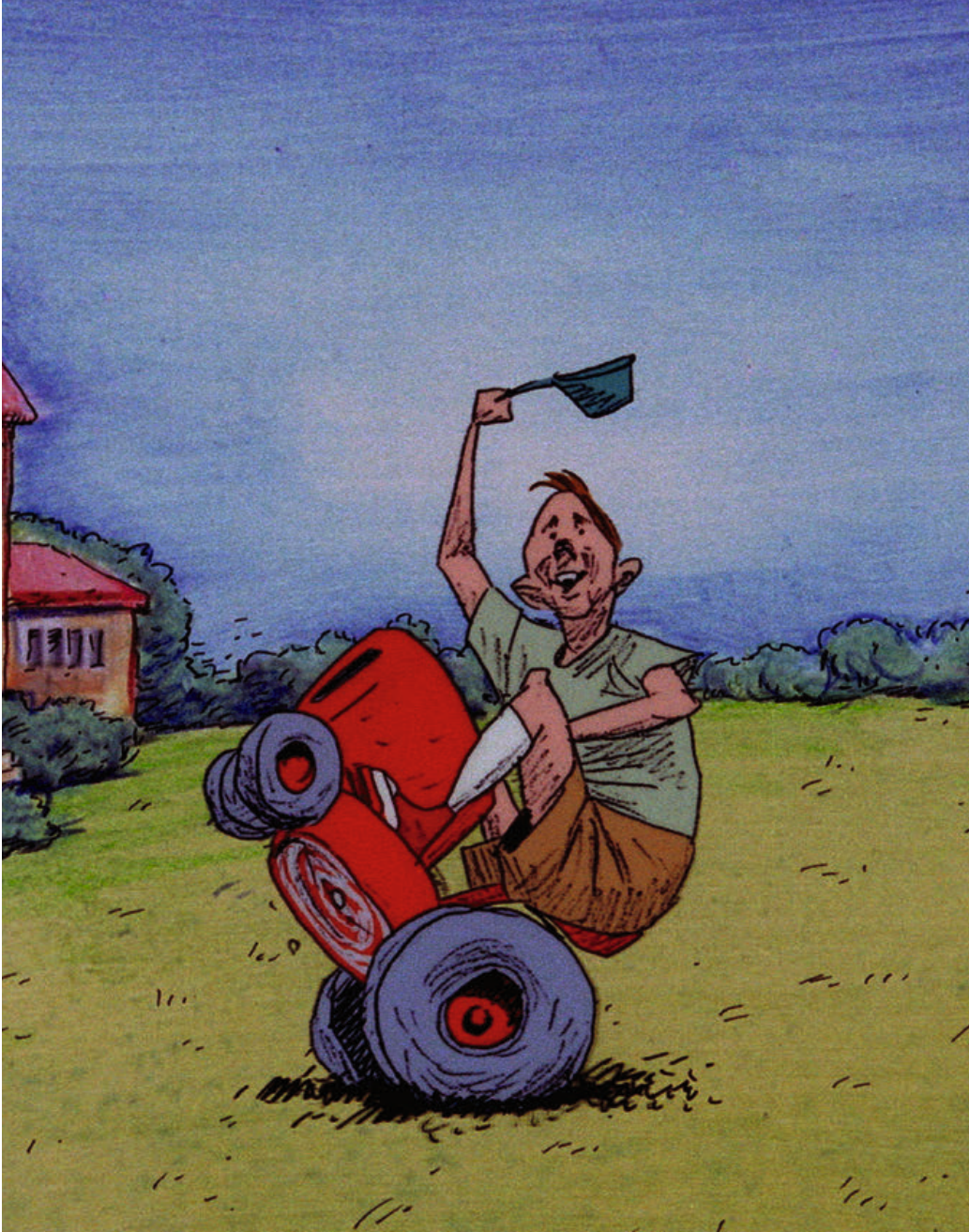
I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON!

by

David B. Levy

In the late 1980s and early 90s I was a High School student dreaming of becoming an animator. Luckily for me, the animation industry was rapidly evolving into a new and exciting era. There was the prime time animated hit series *The Simpsons*, the surprise success of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, Disney and Bluth were fighting it out in the box office, Pixar was exploring ground-breaking 3D animation in each new short, there was Brad Bird's *Family Dog* episode of Steven Spielberg's anthology series *Amazing Stories*, and last, but not least, the distribution of brand new independent animated shorts at *Spike and Mike's Festival of Animation* and it's more respectable cousin *The Tournee of International Animation*. It was at the latter, at a small theatre on Bleecker Street where I first saw Bill Plympton's work, the one-two punch of his second and third shorts, *One of Those Days* and *How To Kiss.*

I didn't know at the time that Plympton began as an illustrator. That gave him a unique point of view in indie animated film, which was like a trick within a trick. Animation is the illusion of motion created when a series of still images are projected at 24 frames a second, but Plympton's animation made you laugh while also reminding you that each frame was, in fact, a hand-rendered individual drawing. Letting his drawings linger and repeat more than any other animator before him, Plympton the illustrator, never put down his pencil even as Plympton the animated filmmaker took over his life and career. The only change was the medium. His 1987 debut animated short film, *Your Face*, not only set his template of gorgeous colored-pencil illustrations come to life, it was nominated for an Academy Award.



None of this was lost on me. While the animation industry was waking up all through the late 1980s and early 90s, the medium of animation (since the golden age of animation in the 1930s) was still all about combining the efforts of teams of people into one unified production that erased everyone's fingerprints along the way. Plympton stood apart in celebrating what the scrappy individual could do on their own. I didn't think about it at the time, but my thesis film at The School of Visual Arts featured a colored pencil technique on paper, influenced by Plympton.

I'm far from alone in being fascinated with Bill Plympton's films and career. Trying to describe his impact, John R. Dilworth, the creator of *Courage The Cowardly Dog*, once said, "Is he not our God?" Where the average indie animator completes an animated film on a strict schedule of once in a while to almost never, Plympton (to this day) makes one or two animated shorts a year and completes an animated feature every three years or so. While most indies painstakingly scratch out time to make a short film in between work, freelance, and life commitments, Bill's earns his living through his films, with even commissioned work (such as commercials and music videos) done in his signature style. Eventually in 2011, I was able to put my fascination with Plympton's work to good use as the co-author of his lavishly illustrated coffee table book, *Independently Animated: Bill Plympton, The Life and Art of the King of Indie Animation* (Universe press).

But let's jump back to 1997 when I was a working animator in NYC, with a ticket stub in hand and a tub of popcorn, ready to see Plympton's second indie animated feature film, *I Married a Strange Person!*. His then recent short *How to Make Love to a Woman* (1995) had taken a walk on the wilder side with much more violence and sexual humor, marking a turning point in his career. Plympton recalls, "I'd been watching a lot of Japanese animation and I was struck by the amount of overtly adult content, which to me, was a breath of fresh air. Despite Ralph Bakshi's work in the 70s, hardly anyone one was telling animated adult stories in the U.S. The Japanese were doing it, so why couldn't I do it here? *How to Make Love to a Woman* was the first of a whole series of projects that featured extreme violence and nudity. It kicked off my 'raunchy' phase." Acknowledging the connection, Plympton includes part of *How to Make Love to a Woman* in *I Married a Strange Person!.*

Another influence that Plympton was to draw upon (pun intended) in *I Married a Strange Person!*, was Peter Jackson's film, *Dead Alive*, which blew him away. "Here was a full-bore gore filmmaker, with a very creative and over-the-top sense of humor! *Dead Alive* was the kind of film I wanted to make. So I began to play with story ideas that could maximize that kind of humor, and enlisted the help of my old *National Lampoon* cartoon buddy, P.C. Vey."

While Plympton remained a one-man animation army, drafting every drawing in his feature, he was assisted by a recent arrival in NY Animation, Signe Baumane, who had hailed from Latvia, and showed up at Bill's door, looking for work. "She showed me her artwork. Her films were charming, with great colors, and it looked like she had experience painting animated cels. I offered her a job on the spot, and she accepted."

Plympton had never seen anyone like her ––she was a hurricane of activity! As quick as he finished his drawings, it seemed like she had them painted, dried, stacked and filed in folders. "Baumane was a genius––how did she do it? Usually I'd need a team of 10 people to keep up with me!" Sharp-eyed viewers will notice an easter egg in the film featuring a car's vanity license plate with the name "Signe" printed on it, paying tribute to the artist.

Unlike his previous works, Plympton wanted this film to have something of a realistic look, so he actually held a casting call for actors, and selected people who he thought had faces that matched his imagination. He also videotaped the actors in difficult poses, so that when he animated those scenes, he would have a good idea of the postures, shadows, and fabrics. You can see the influence of the actors and their attitudes on their characters in a loving "side by side" presented as part of the end credits.

Plympton considers *I Married a Strange Person!* to be the first adult film he'd ever done. In fact, it was so raunchy that it was never rated. Aiming to shock people by pushing the limits of bad taste with lots of sex and violence and crazy storytelling, Plympton declares, "It is by far my most twisted film."

In *I Married a Strange Person!*, writers Plympton and P.C. Vey muse on fate, marriage, sex, violence, the power of the media, and, surprisingly, the eternal struggle to find a work/life balance. Just after leading man Grant carries his new bride, Keri, across the threshold, she tries to initiate their honeymoon. But Grant goes back to work instead, in a home office in their living room! What was probably a plot convenience to set Grant's job in the home now looks like a prediction of the post-Covid era of working from home.

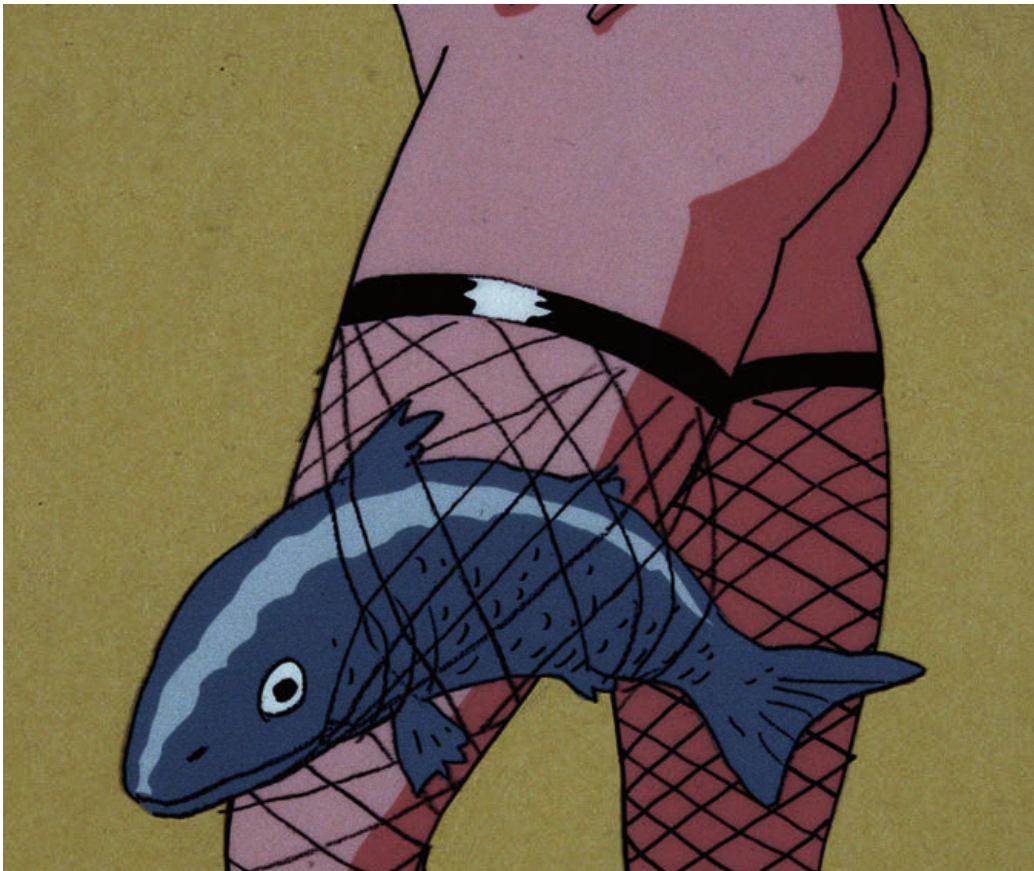
Just before Grant's marriage, a freaky beam ricocheting off a satellite dish caused a boil to appear on the back of his neck, giving him the ability to change the state of reality based on his thoughts, desires, and daydreams. These strange new powers must also resemble what Plympton feels holding his pencil, where anything is possible. Nowhere is this better realized than an imaginative sequence where Grant and Keri finally consummate their marriage and during the sex act, Grant transforms Keri into a nun, a cheerleader, duplicates of herself, and finally an abstract goofball cartoon character. Is the latter Grant's version of thinking of baseball to prolong intercourse before climaxing? Or is Grant simply working through all his fetishes? Maybe it's both.

Grant's new powers are a gift but they are also problems that complicate his life, and being married means Keri's life just got complicated too. All marriages bring surprises. In its own sick and twisted way, this film asks the relatable question, "How well does anyone really know anybody?"

Besides being chock full of sex and gore, the film sure makes time for small but memorable details, such as the quiet but smoldering resentment Keri's parents feel for Grant at a family dinner at their house. Despite the fact that they've already cut and removed Grant from the wedding photos, they still go through the motions of hosting the young couple.

It could be easy to think Plympton and Vey wrote the script in lively carefree session of "and then this happens…," but the film rewards by pulling all those seemingly unrelated details together and not wasting a scrap. Those horny birds from the beginning of the film? We might just see them again. The gorgeous restoration of this film on Blu-ray makes it even more fun to revel in every moment.

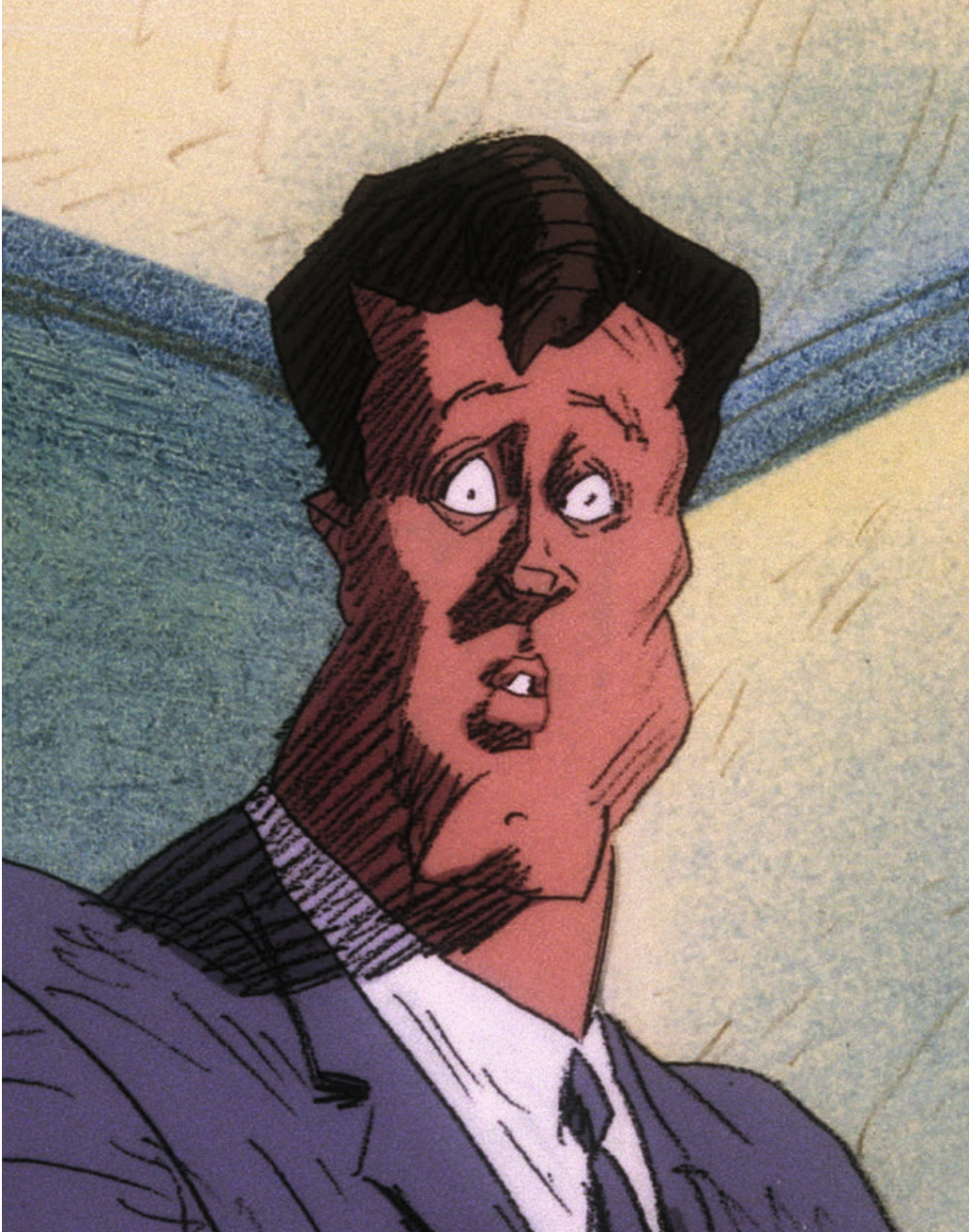
Meanwhile the soundtrack is as idiosyncratic as any aspect of the movie, and Plympton's frequent partner in music, Maureen McElheron, who penned all the songs in his first feature, *The Tune*, returns to add the toe-tapping tunes. Whenever things threaten to veer off the road too far into sex and violence, McElheron grabs the wheel and her music always brings a smile. In one adorable moment near the climax of the film, Grant and Keri manage to get away in their convertible, having just survived the impossible, and turn to each other and point while launching into a reprise of the song "How'd You Get To Be So Cute?" Not only will their marriage survive, but they might just become that annoying couple that likes each other so much it makes everyone sick.

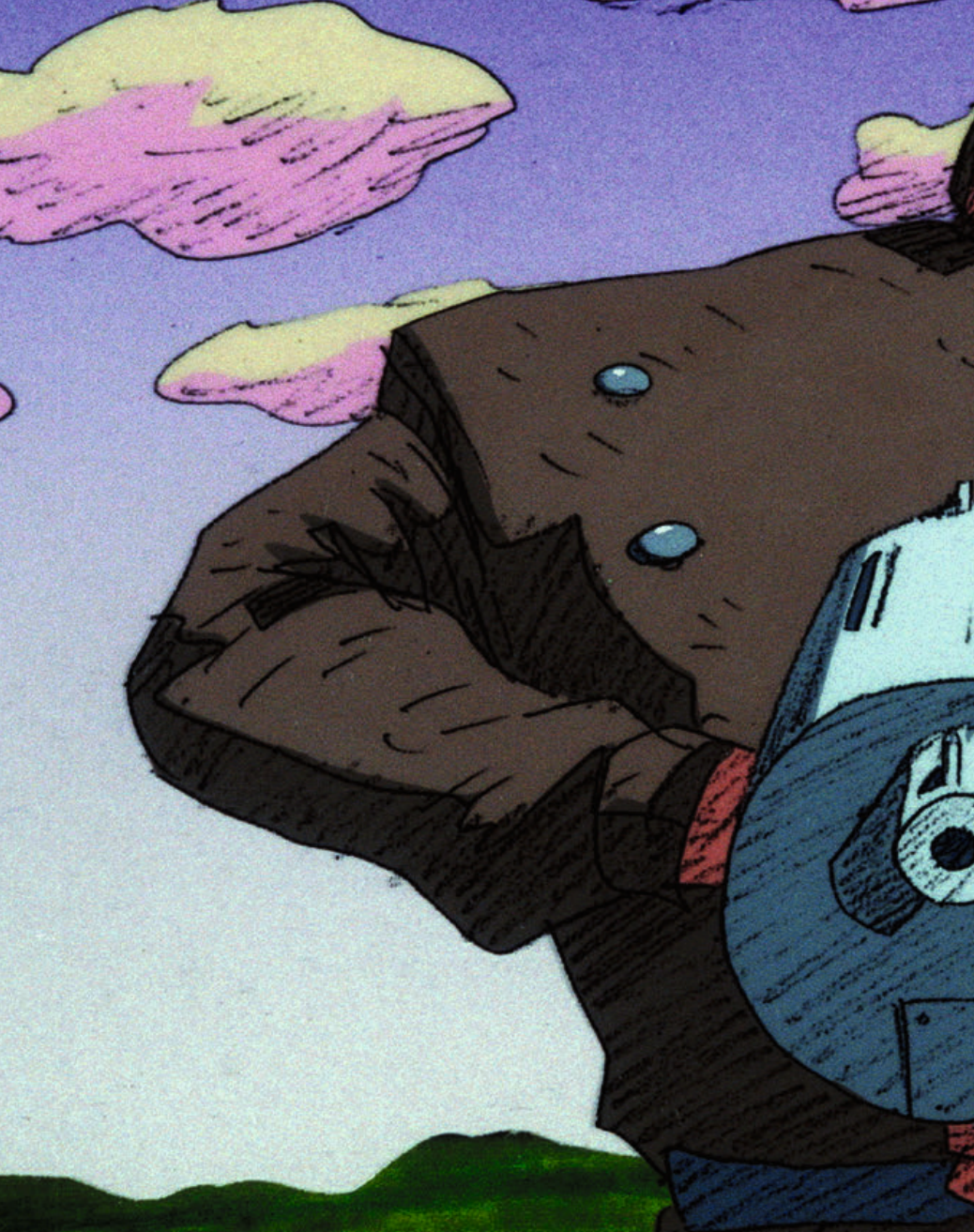


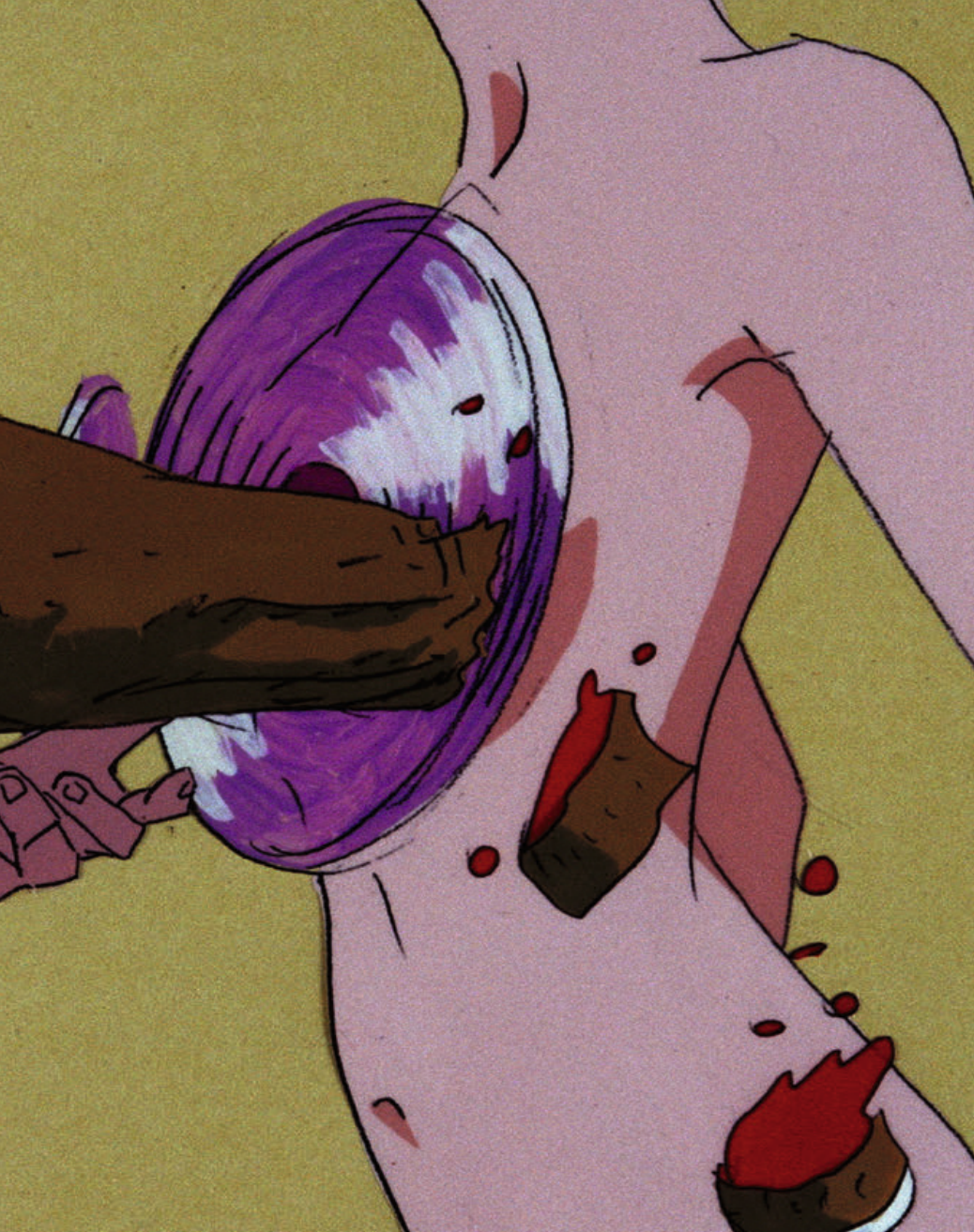
As for the film's reception upon release, Plympton recalls, "We sent copies to the film festivals, and I got a very good response. It was especially exciting for me to return to the Sundance Festival in 1998, where the first screening went very well, although we got no offers. Then, the next day, while riding to another screening, I ran into Tom Ortenberg of Lionsgate Entertainment on the bus. Why he was taking a bus and not a limo, I don't know. But, having him as a captive audience, I pitched *I Married a Strange Person!*, which he had seen and liked, but was undecided if there was an audience for such an outrageous film.Just then, a young college-age kid in a snowboarder outfit piped up, 'Yeah! I loved *I Married a Strange Person*! It rocked!' and then jumped out of the bus and ran up the hill. Tom looked at me and said, 'I guess we'll take it!' It was that easy. I have no idea who that kid was, but he saved my bacon."

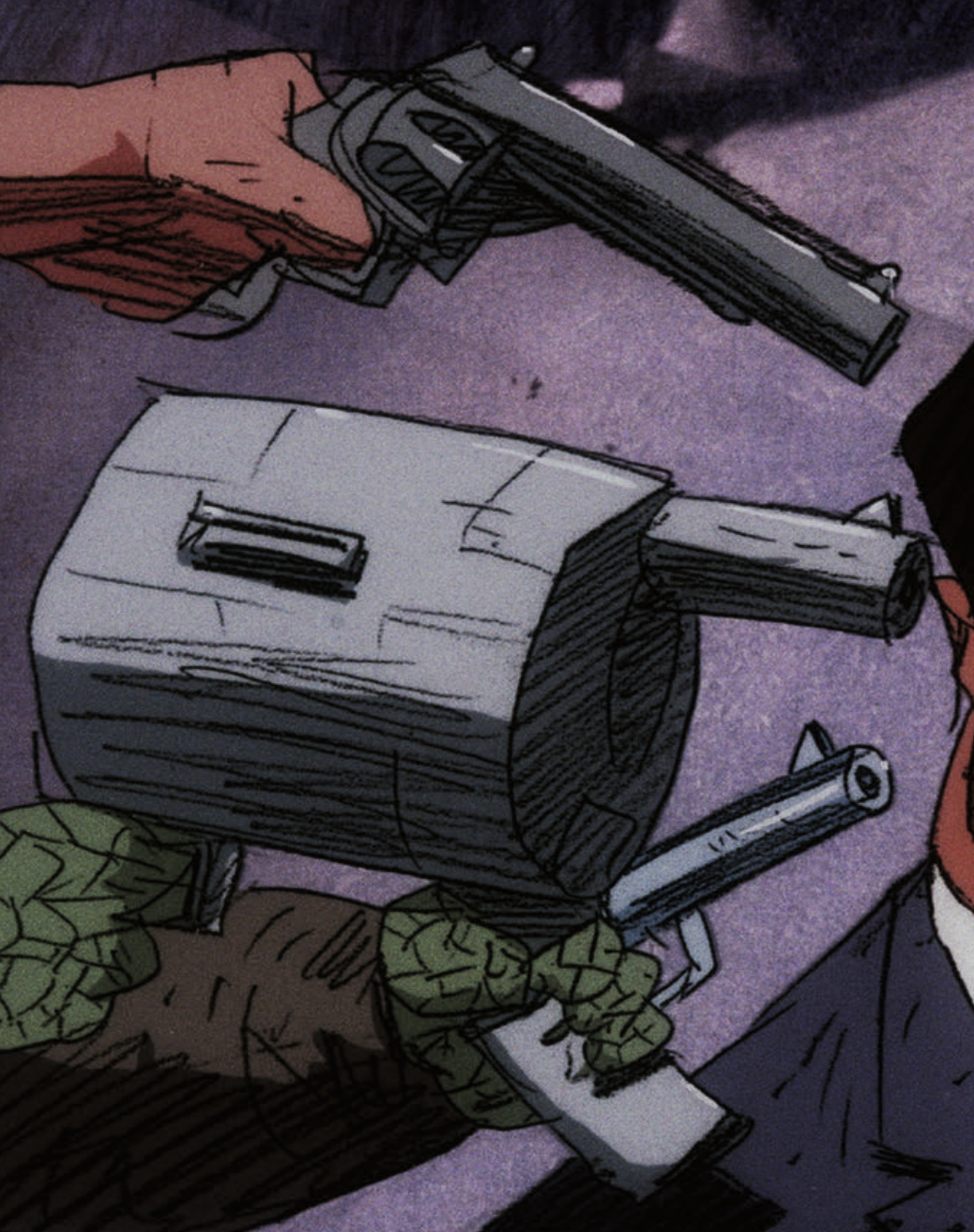
Plympton would go on to put that bacon to good use, continuing to produce more celebrated animated feature films and shorts right up to the present day, including another Oscar nominated short, *Guard Dog*, in 2004. I wonder if one price Plympton has paid for his incredible productivity might be that we've become accustomed to his ordinary excellence. But pop in this Blu-ray and you'll see that there's nothing ordinary about *I Married a Strange Person!*.

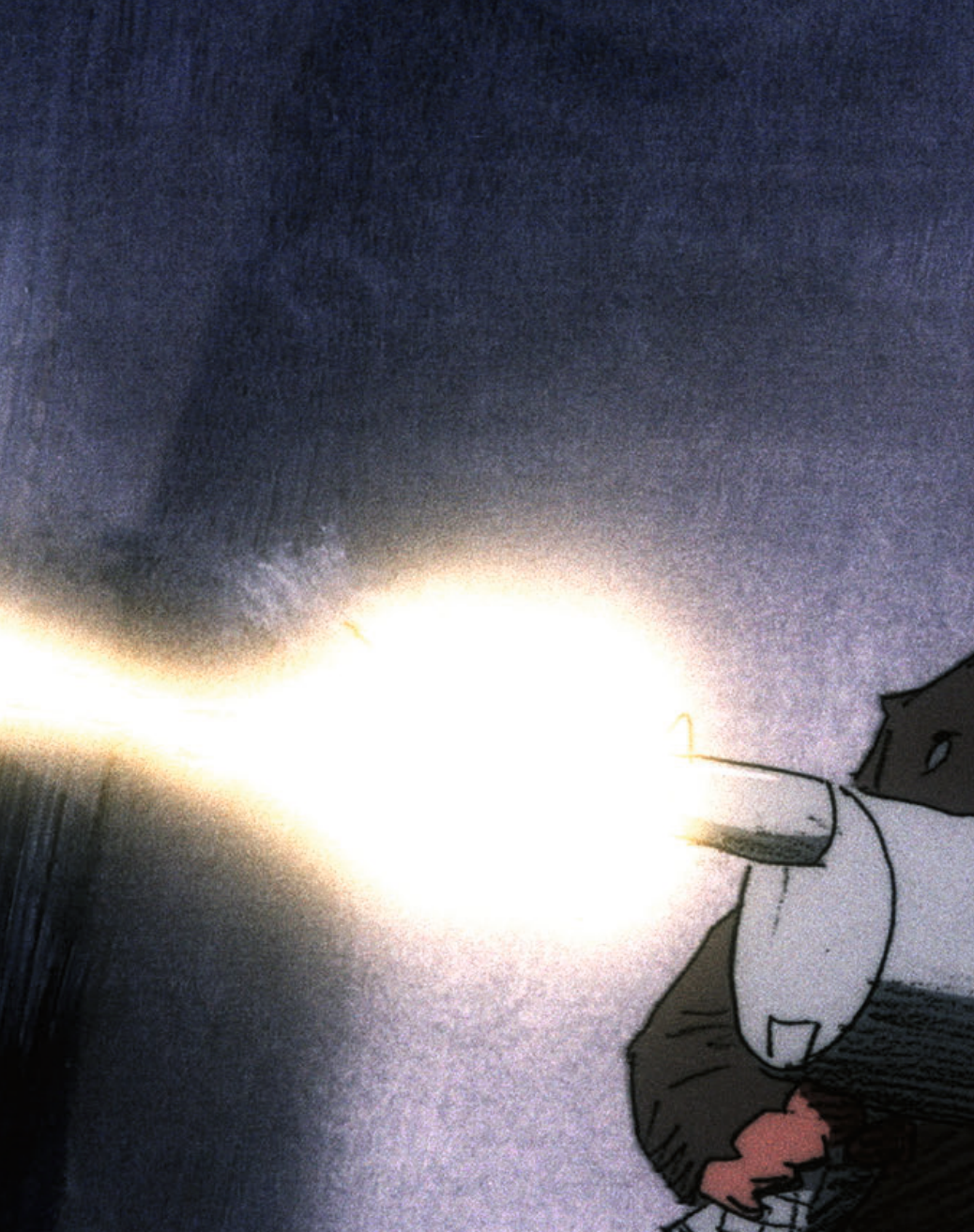
David B. Levy is the Head of Studio at Pinkfong USA. With more than 20 years of experience in animation and development, Levy has worked for several entertainment corporations such as The Walt Disney Company, Invisible Universe, Viacom International, and more. Levy is the author of several best selling books on the animation industry, including *Your Career in Animation: How to Survive and Thrive (2nd edition, 2021)*.











Notes on the Film Restoration:

I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON! was restored in 2K in 2019 from the original 35mm camera negatives and sound elements, with Bill Plympton's participation and approval.

Special Thanks to:

Bill Plympton
John Holderried
Adam Rackoff
James Hancock
Jerry Beck
Walter Chaw
David Levy
Patton Oswalt
Chris Miller
Beth Morris
David Mackenzie / Fidelity In Motion
Jesse Nelson / DiabolikDVD

Feature & Shorts: © Bill Plympton / Plymptoons Studios under license to Deaf Crocodile Films 2024. Additional Bonus Features: © Deaf Crocodile Films 2024.